

GENDERBENT:
NOTES FROM THE
DRAG KING COMMUNITY

\$3

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the femme issue



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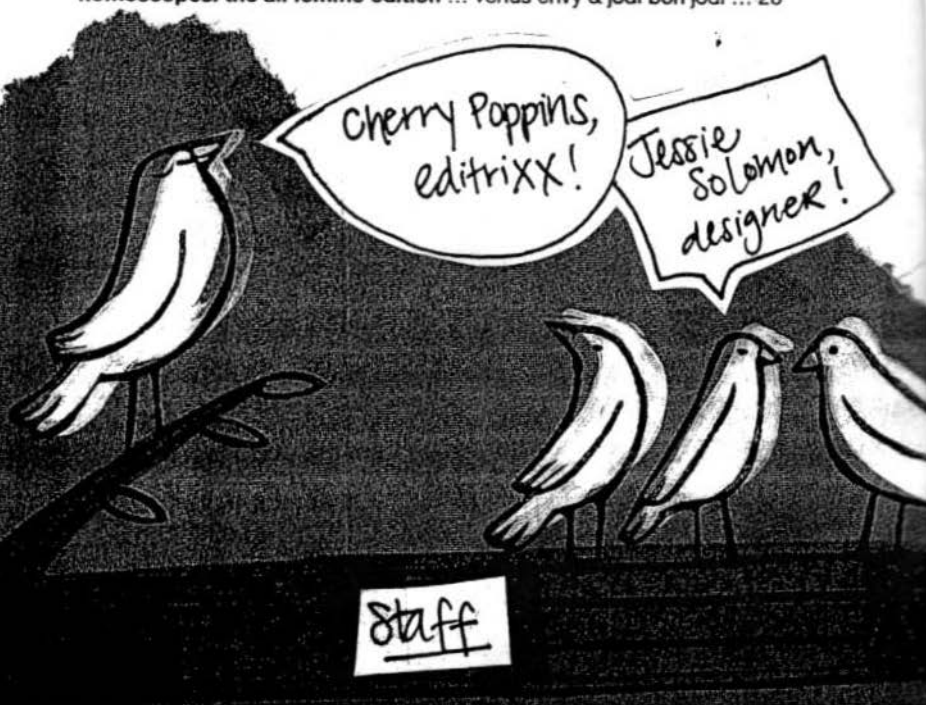
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UNTITLED

fatti & wendi

on respect...

does dressing more femme or butch play a vital role in how others perceive and treat you?



Hetero Normative Society

dressing femme can be vulnerable.

What is femme?

\Rightarrow Quasi?

What is batch?

What are the levels
on various tiers of identity?

Spiritual

Physical

Intellectual

Emotional

✓ Hetero Normative Society = ☐
OMD



We want the box!
To perform is heels,
or not to perform is
heels... why is that always
my question?





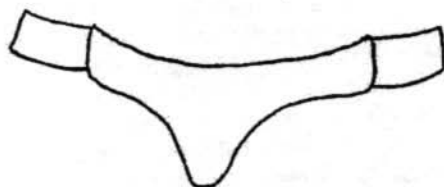
I do always know
what fem means.
but I'm often assumed
to be one. It feels
fun and feels. It feels
highly visible.
and



Prune,
Prave,
Polish

... a girl's
job is never
done.

FAT
K



The pressures and perks!!!

3

wendi - soft butch, soft femme, art fag

fatti - soft butch, soft femme, drag fag

wendi + fatti = expressing different dimensions of a similar identity

Wendi and I have had countless conversations about our identities. We have very similar gender identities that are, more often than not, expressed visibly in very different ways. I'm often assumed to be femme, and Wendi is often assumed to be butch. Living in a place where the commitment to gender binaries run deep, that seems to be all we can be - butch or femme.

I'm constantly trying to deconstruct my interpretations of femininity and masculinity as it greatly impacts the way I portray myself in everyday life and on stage. Whether my thoughts on genders and identities are ones I've recognized or they remain internalized, they'll reveal themselves on stage and in my everyday thoughts.

Performing femininity has been very challenging for me because I was not sure that I fully understood what femininity is. My own perception of it felt very superficial. I'm not sure if I've carried around a devalued interpretation of femininity or if I've only seen it as a window dressing. No matter what the reason, I felt like my performance offering was so limited when it came to femininity. On stage, there seems to be a decorative nature to femininity. Maybe that's a reflection of real life. It feels like the femme decor is used to increase the appearance of masculinity by contrast, and it certainly seemed to not carry its own weight on stage.

I saw a performance in Houston this summer that really rattled my perceptions of femininity, and issued to me a call of accountability. This amazing performance took place at the *Gendermyn's Summer Lovin' through the Decades* show in June. Aaysof began performing Beyonce's *Get Me Bodied* in a way that I'd imagine any femme performer doing it. She had the cute hair, great outfit, and boots to match! She was all over that stage getting us hyped and excited as she told us she was going to be herself that-

night. I believed it too. On stage with everything as unnatural as it was, I sang the lyrics aloud - "I wanna be myself tonight...don't you see my body...". Somewhere in the middle of that song, the tone changed entirely. Something that sounded like bullets rained down on the song. This energetic performer who was so into the crowd earlier, suddenly completely disconnected herself from us. She looked confused and upset. She began to take off her boots, clothes, and the ponytail clip. The song became totally warped and all we could hear was the slow and deep "don't you see my body...". I became quiet and confused just listening to the warped music and seeing a woman's *real* body, beautiful and unaltered, possibly for the first time ever. She made me accountable, right then and there, for cheering so loud when she was a fake hair wearin', hip shakin', "femme" and then standing there stunned and quiet when she showed us that she was a real woman who didn't need to be pruned and transformed to be beautiful. She called me out right there, and that night I think I began to grasp the idea of femininity. I began to understand its range and power. Femme isn't decorative or silent, altered or manufactured, shallow or boxed. That night I saw femininity as powerful, commanding, loud, funny, smart, intuitive, angry, beautiful, natural, uncompromising, independent, and personal. That night, femininity knew my eyes were sealed shut and knew exactly what I had to feel in order to open them.

That performance challenges me every day as a femme-type person and as a person who performs within the duality of femininity and masculinity.





drag king to femme

bevin branlandingham

The first time I dressed in drag was an abject failure. Well, I did appear as a male, which I suppose was the ultimate point. But while I was going for the look of the slightly sleazy but mostly titillating "flasher," I ended up presenting closer to homeless. I looked as though I should smell like beer, which was ironic since I was selling beer at the Mr. Philadelphia Drag King Contest.

Having no formal training in drag, I'd slapped some badly chopped up costume hair onto my face with liquid latex – the ultimate effect was patchy and unkempt rather than the goatee I had envisioned. Luckily, from planning that event I met Johnny KingPin and Heath/er Grey, who would shortly tap me to be one of the founding members of the Royal Renegades of Philadelphia. At the first meeting we had, I learned how to properly cut and apply facial hair, bind, and pack. Soon we coordinated routines and began performing in earnest throughout the area. I loved the stage, the audience, making people laugh while hosting shows and really came into my own as a performer in a way I previously hadn't in other genres. But while I heard fellow kings talk about feeling at home in their drag characters and wanting to stay in drag all night after a show, I couldn't wait to get mine off. Sure, Dick Carrier was fantastic onstage and I loved developing his outrageous back story and stitching extensive sequins onto otherwise masculine costumes. I just didn't feel right in male drag.

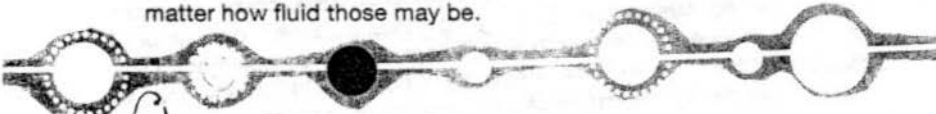
What I really enjoyed about the drag king community was that I was beginning to hear a language I hadn't heard before. People called me Femme and did so with a reverence I wasn't accustomed to. I came out in a big university in a small town, where lipstick lesbian was a derisive term and the only way to get dates (I thought) was to present as androgynously as possible, never going too butch or too Femme. Coupled with being a lifelong fat girl and told to cover up and hide, I was drowning myself in men's clothes and hardly confident enough to show my arms let alone any cleavage. By the time I was beginning to

perform as a King, I was 22 and starting to wear dresses and lose the Old Navy button-up shirts. I had to bring a lot more luggage to shows with me to account for my after-party wear, but it was a huge relief to be able to get into my skin again after being hidden under a cowboy hat and a giant moustache.


My relationship with my drag king character became even more complex as I saw how it challenged the people I knew. People who had never seen me perform literally stuttered when they realized it was me behind the crazy southern accent, sunglasses, and exaggerated politician demeanor. I developed a femme queen character to complement Dick Carrier – his ex wife, Regyna – who I would usually change into during the intermission of the show. Inspired by Heath/er Grey and other drag performers before her (Luster/Lustivious Dela Virgion, for example), I played with illustrating for the audience exactly what an illusion gender really is. As a Femme, though, the opposite was true for me with my femme queen character as had been for my drag king persona. I felt completely at home in femme drag. Having the opportunity (okay, excuse) to drop money on elaborate femme costumes, glamming myself up as much as possible, learning to wear fake eyelashes and wig pieces and other tools of high femme glamour, I was thrilled. Rather than the business of drag as a means of performing my character, I was using accoutrements to learn more and more how to feel at home in my body. In fact, dressing in drag gave me a microscopic eye toward the markers of gender in a way that I wouldn't have otherwise paid attention to and accelerated my path towards Femme gender presentation.

After my first few years of drag performance, I began my involvement in NOLOSE, a National organization for Queer women and Transfolks of size. This organization and fat activism as a movement gave me language for the feelings that drag had imbued in me. I could feel at home in my body no matter what size I happen to be. I can present as scantily clad as I want to and be just as sexy as I feel – and after all of those years of performance I know I leave my audience wanting to fuck a fat girl. While the drag king community gave me language and support for my Queer Femme identity, NOLOSE gave me language and support for fat activism, empowerment, and body pride.

Almost eight years after that first attempt at drag, I am beginning to explore my gender beyond Femme. Discovering how it is that I feel so at home in false eyelashes and a Femme presentation that is more bravado and bordello than simply "girly." That my gender icons are Dolly Parton and The World Famous "BOB" and what that means in the context of what most people see as Femme. Further, I am pushing performance beyond the stage and into the realm of community building - trying to give others without access to drag and fat activist communities a taste of what it is like to experience a life filled with rhetoric that it is perfectly acceptable to be the gender you feel inside yourself and be at home in the shape of body you're in - no matter how fluid those may be.



**THIS BULLET DON'T CARE
IF YOU'VE GOT AN EXCUSE**
ked aka vendetta lacroix



I go by many names, but in my queen form I am known as Merry Vendetta LaCroix, or just Vendetta LaCroix. Vendetta is the most recent in a long line of bioqueen names I've devised for myself, but I think I'll stick with this one.

I began my queening career when I first started doing drag. For me there was never any question as to whether or not I would have a female persona. New Orleans is a small town, and if we were to have a good troupe, I thought I owed it to my troupe to be as versatile as possible. My drag queen persona oscillated between coquettish and dominant, much the same way I did when I was dating men.

My first drag queen persona was named Ivana Cox, the female counterpart to my male persona, Kyle Cox. I thought

it was a pretty good pun, but then the L-Word came out, featuring a drag king named Ivan A Cox. This put me in a bit of a bind. I didn't want people to think I was copying the L-Word, and I was reasonably sure that I could not win a copyright suit against Showtime, so I changed my name to Fury. I think I must have been upset about something at the time... I can't remember.

I re-emerged as Vendetta LaCroix after my Katrina exile. I was upset about the way all levels of government handled the whole disaster. I also wanted a French last name. Vendetta LaCroix literally means Vendetta the Cross, which is a pun about Vendetta's character.

In my personal life, I've always seen myself as a strong woman, but Vendetta is way stronger than I am. She is the type of girl who would never take any crap from a lover, regardless of gender. She wouldn't make the mistakes I did, and if she did, she'd bounce right back.

Vendetta is my hero. She is my angry vagina. She's a far more serious character than Kyle, who is basically a clown. She is refined, unassailable, and unflappable. If she had a super power, it would be like those of Emma Frost of the Marvel X-Men universe. She is hard and lethal in emergencies, but brilliant, if slightly distant, under normal circumstances. Good thing drag shows don't often result in mortal combat against supervillains or robots, as I would have a hard time pulling off telekinesis.

Unlike Kyle, who is the uber-geeky masculine part of me, Vendetta is larger than life. If they were real people, I would hang out and play video games with Kyle, but Vendetta would be way too cool for me to hang out with. If Vendetta had a job, she'd either be a baroness, an assassin, or both. Where Kyle is comfortable working in a group, Vendetta walks alone, and prefers it that way. It's not that she's a snob, it's almost as if she doesn't know what to do with normal people. Whenever Vendetta is in an act with other performers, she usually towers over them and is almost always more ostentatiously dressed - she has a wardrobe I would never wear in public. She almost looks like a comic book heroine character brought to life with her short platinum hair and her bright, tight clothing, which is exactly the way she's supposed to look.



FEMME TALES (A WORK IN PROGRESS)

cherry poppins

I.

A few years ago, I attended a burlesque workshop. The instructor told us all about how when she was young, she wanted to be a drag queen, and she would preen and prance with boas or any glamorous prop she could find. She was thrilled to discover burlesque because, as she said, "There's no other place for women to be over-the-top like that." She couldn't wait to teach us so that we could "unlock our inner queens."

I laughed to myself because, you know, I already was a drag queen. A femme queen. I did learn a few good moves in that workshop, though.

I too wanted to be a drag queen when I was little, before I even knew they existed. In my mother's bedroom (it was bigger than mine and had the dresser mirror), I covertly choreographed an entire sequence to "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus," complete with coy sashays and eyelash bats, at the ripe age of 7-and-a-half. I begged for ballet lessons, and had to settle instead for playing dress-up with my favorite aunt's costumes from teenage dance recitals. The beginning of my love affair with pink tulle and tiaras!

I was such a baby femme. Such, such, such. Barbies and frills and skirts that twirled, and I was all flirts and sass. I see the ways I was trained to be a girl, but I also loved it (and no one in my conservative, southern, evangelical family ever taught me how to sashay). I couldn't even fathom my tomboy friends who wanted to be boys when they grew up. I thought, "But boys don't get to wear lipstick." (I know differently now, of course.)

However: family lore also says that after being told one too many times to "act like a lady," I rolled my eyes and sighed, "I think it should be 'act like a person,' Grandma." Perhaps I was already aware of the ways in which femininity can fucking suck sometimes. *Compulsory femininity*, that is. I liked the outfits and the attitude, but I wasn't so into the rules: Speak only in dulcet tones, never too loud or brassy. Don't shout. Sit still. Don't talk back. Don't curse. Sit like a lady: Ladies don't show their underpants! You'll get a real grown-up manicure set if you just stop biting your nails already. A little makeup, *always*. But not too heavy-handed – only whores have painted faces. Shave your armpits, dear, it's unladylike. Black is slimming. Order the salad. Don't give it up too easily; once you've put out, what do you have left? *Never* on the first date, dear. And

don't argue; let him be right, let him win, let him earn more than you.
Be nice. Be nice. Be nice.

II.

Yes, I'm in the show.
No, I'm not so-and-so's new girlfriend.
I'm actually the producer.
Asshole.

III.

I remember first taking the stage at a drag king show as a femme, and I felt seen for the first time. Seen as a queer, seen as a member of this community. Visible. Desired. Recognized. Applauded.

Occasionally, a king-friend tells me a story of drag as healing – a story of the first time he was applauded for his masculinity rather than chastised. She tells me all of this with an air of revelation, as if I could have no idea how this feels. Oh, ze has no idea. I tell a similar story.

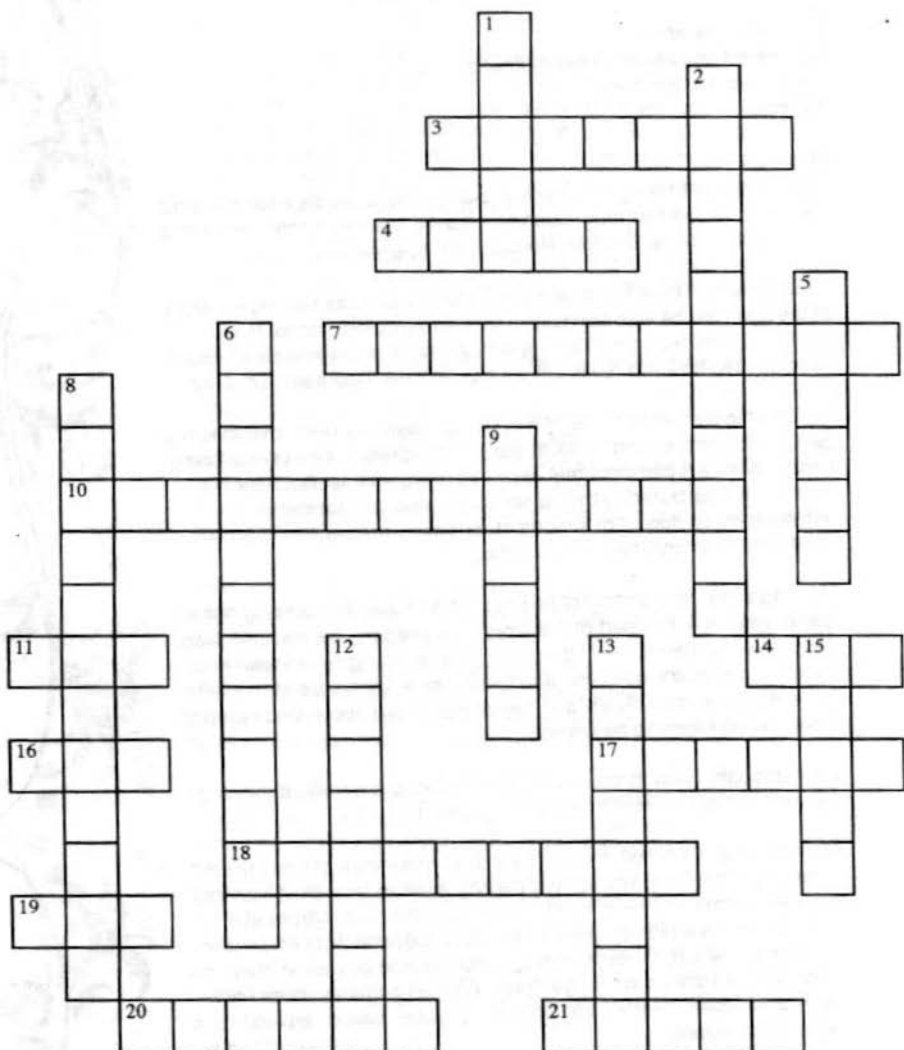
I know I have an easier time of it in lots of ways. My body matches my gender expression, and I look at ease in girl clothes. I can smile pretty, I can play nice, I can pass real easily. She knows this. But here is a secret: I feel as boxed in by the norms of good-girl normative femininity as ze does. I'm sure most femmes would agree. Maybe most women everywhere would agree.

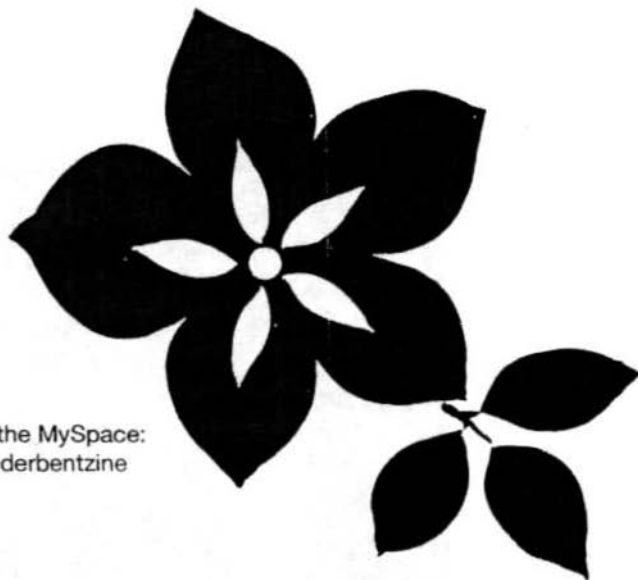
My drag story, also a story of healing. When I was first coming out as queer (you know this part of the story), I pushed my femme self deep, deep down to attempt to fit that sought-after young dyke ideal. And then, I saw a drag king show, and there was a femme performer with them, and she was actually an integral part of the show, and I thought, "That's what I want to be doing."

Soon enough, I was. It sounds a bit dramatic, but it really did change the direction of my life. Or at least, my identity.

Through drag, I allowed my femme to play in a way that she couldn't in real life. Over time, she started playing more in "real life." I started IDing as femme and wearing all the skirts I want. But: offices still frown on tits-pushed-up-to-here and other Extreme Acts of Gender... So to keep my job, I keep it (mostly) under wraps by day. Without the stage, without drag, I would go crazy. Without a space where I am seen, applauded, desired, valued. Visibly queer, visibly femme. It's a rare space, indeed.

all femme, all the time





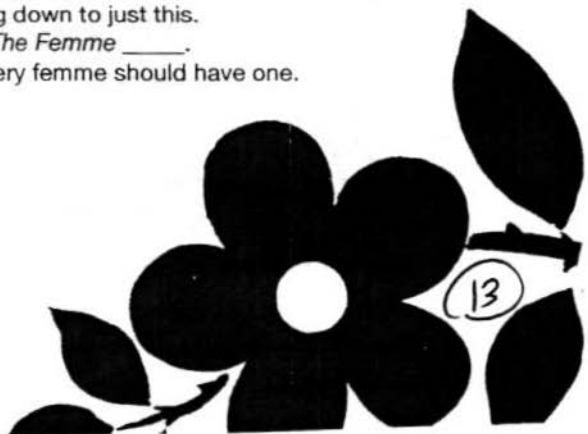
For answers, find us on the MySpace:
www.myspace.com/genderbentzine

ACROSS

- 3 Nipple cover-ups
- 4 ____ and Animal
- 7 Country crooner, femme icon – rumored to be queer, to boot
- 10 Sex activist who might get you “moist”
- 11 ____ or Sephora? That is the question..
- 14 2006 femme documentary
- 16 Sally Rand made this dance famous.
- 17 Go-to cosmetic when you need things to stick around
- 18 Beth Ditto’s band
- 19 Feather ____
- 20 Steve ____: Comfortable but cute
- 21 Burlesque fest: ____-o-Rama

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- 1 Author of *S/HE*, Minnie Bruce
- 2 Femme is a ____ identity, too!
- 5 Some of us prefer these boots to platforms.
- 6 Frequent and founded femme complaint
- 8 Beginning of Violet’s (in)famous *Bound* line
- 9 Frequently used modifier to femme: Rarr!
- 12 You might enjoy stripping down to just this.
- 13 Newman authored this, *The Femme* ____.
- 15 The crowning touch - every femme should have one.





kentucky fried woman

Oakland, CA

interview by cherry poppins



I've known Kentucky Fried Woman (aka Krista Smith, aka KFW) for a few years now. She's by far one of my favorite femme performers, with a very long resume in queer performance and gender activism. She kicked off her queer performance career in 2000 as a member of the Santa Barbara based drag troupe the Disposable Boy Toys before moving to Seattle and founding the Queen Bees, an all-femme, fat-positive draglesque troupe, in 2002. In 2005, she said goodbye to the Queen Bees and moved to Oakland, where she founded ButchBallet, ButchTap, and Titland, and performs as Hermione Granger in *Hogwarts Express: The Musical*. KFW also speaks on and produces panels and workshops on the intersections of identities and bodies. She served as the Performance co-Chair for *Femme2006* and is the Program Coordinator for *Femme 2008*. And! You can check her out as one of the femmes featured in the new book *Femmes of Power* featuring the photography of Del LaGrace Volcano.

C: So how'd you get started in performing?

K: Well, I started dancing when I was three years old and was actually a competitive tap dancer by the time I was in third grade. By junior high school I was also singing in various choirs and appearing in a lot of singing productions at church. And by high school I was doing some theater. All of that was in Lexington, KY where I grew up. So I suppose it is fair to say that I have had the performance bug in me, well, pretty much my whole life.

But one of the things that kept happening was that my weight kept getting in the way of things in that world. I basically got kicked out of my dance studio when I was in eighth grade for being too fat, and when it came to theater, I was never taken seriously for any lead roles because of my size. I was not considered a realistic love object as it were.

So I got totally bummed out about performing and decided to stop and become an academic. I got my B.A. in history from the University of Kentucky and headed out to good ol' Santa Barbara California for graduate school. I was also

coming to terms with my queer identity and entered into my first queer community in Santa Barbara.

C: How did you get from there to the drag king community?

K: As it turns out, I was an unbelievably terrible graduate student. But I turned out to be a great queer! (laughs) There were these super hot butches and bois in Santa Barbara who had just started performing drag kinging called the Disposable Boy Toys. My best friend, Jessica, and I would go to see them perform. And of course we loved and admired them and each had our own little crushes on them. But more than anything, we wanted to be one of them. Well, kind of. We wanted to be on stage with them. Just not as boys!

C: Sounds so familiar - that's pretty much how it happened for me too! Did they welcome you to join them?

K: Absolutely! First I think that they asked us to start performing with them, and after we did for a few months, we were officially considered part of the group.

C: So you found your way back into performance again.

K: Exactly. Except this time on my own terms and with a group of people who loved and adored me just the way I was.

C: I've noticed that so many of us in the king community - femmes and kings and other genderqueers - have dance and theater backgrounds but didn't find acceptance in those communities, whether for our bodies or our gender, etc.

K: YES! I think that you were absolutely right. And yet, many of us did find acceptance in those communities too, but left still feeling unsatisfied. I think that there are

so many genuinely amazing artists in our community, who truly have all kinds of amazing training either formal or self-taught, and it kind of rocks my world!

C: So what happened after you'd joined up with Disposable Boy Toys?

K: Well, that was just a blissful time. There were seventeen of us in the group and we spent an entire year raising money to get all of us to IDKE3 [the Third International Drag King Extravaganza]. It was awesome. But it also coincided with my leaving graduate school and needing to leave Santa Barbara. So, I actually left Santa Barbara three weeks before IDKE3 to move to Seattle, but DBT still paid for me to go to IDKE with them, and I performed at my first IDKE in both Dragdom and the Showcase. That was in 2001.

Overall, [IDKE] truly was awesome. I mean, I really fell in love with the conference and with the community. But it was a real eye-opener to be out of our little Santa Barbara bubble. In DBT our femme performance was valued and appreciated. And also DBT had an awesome political consciousness and was hyper-aware of not wanting to replicate racism and misogyny on stage, etc. So, when we showed up to Dragdom, we were kind of blown away by some of the racism and sexism we saw on stage. And also by the disrespect that other femme/queen performers were given. Like girls were basically serving as props in king acts and their names wouldn't even be announced as part of the performance.

C: You and a few other femme performers eventually came together and wrote a manifesto about this, right? I had seen this posted on the butch-femme.com listserve at some point and I thought it was amazing, but I never knew how it came about.

K: It was actually the next day at the conference. One of the awesome things about IDKE is that they have the open space, where literally anybody could kind of do an on-the-

spot workshop. So, I went up to the microphone at the open plenary and said that we would like to have a workshop about bio-queening. And so we had a really awesome dialogue and it was from that dialogue that the manifesto was born. Jay Sennett was the keynote for that conference and he actually let us present the manifesto during his keynote! And it immediately became very controversial.

There was a lot of defensiveness about the space and what it represented, but our general response was, "Hey! We are already here in this space! You are using us in your performances. We are asking to be treated as equals and for our gendered performances to be taken as seriously as yours are."

[Editor's Note: You can read the Manifesto in its entirety on p. 22]

At that time, the big thing was that if you were going to perform in the showcase you had to have centralized king content. I think that the reason it was originally instituted was because there was a fear that drag queens were going to take over the conference - like men to women drag queens - and folks wanted to keep it an intentionally women/transmen kind of space I think. There was definitely a lot of fear in the community around all kinds of things, and I get it. It is a drag king conference. I totally get it.

It is just that as kinging grew, so did the theatrics of our performances, and that created larger roles for all kinds of gendered presentations. What I love about IDKE is that unlike Michigan, it has continued to grow, albeit slowly, but grow with the community. IDKE1 was in 1998; think about how much has changed in our community since then!

I hear grumblings by some who feel like the conference is not what it was intended to be. Well, one of the points of the manifesto was look: we are going to perform. So are you going to ghettoize us and make us create our own performance spaces? And further split up the

community? Or are we going to be brought to the table as equals, because again...we were already there. Our performances were just not valued and validated as gendered performances

C: Sometimes I think that critics of femme presence in the king community miss the fact that we are here because we fucking LOVE kings. We don't want to take over and push out king performance!

K: Exactly. And we king, and we queen. And they can king, and they can queen. And exploding the gender binary is exciting and sexy, so let's do it together.

C: I know you ID as femme. I've certainly had people seem to think that my femme performance didn't matter or wasn't drag enough because I'm femme in "real" life, too. Do you get this from people?

K: One of the things we discuss in the bio-queen manifesto was why our butch and trans-male performers were considered drag kings when they were performing the same gender on and off stage but ours was not.

Now this one is a little more complicated of course because historically drag has always been considered in biological terms, and if a woman is a biological woman but butch and performing male drag then that is drag, but we really pushed the community to take biology out of that equation. Because at the same time we were also so active in the transgender rights movement and it seemed like that movement was exploding concepts of gender so much that we could no longer define drag by the bio definition any more.

Which does lead to my biggest regret and that is that we really popularized the term bio-queen, which I really hate now. At the time, we were just so thankful to have a term that defined us in some way but very quickly after starting to use it, we realized that it was so problematic. I remember when we arrived at IDKE4, Sile was so exited

because they had made bio-queen t-shirts to sell, and it was so totally sweet, and we were also like...oh. We don't call ourselves that anymore. But other girls all over the country had totally adopted the term and still use it.

When I first stopped using the term bio-queen I was kind of on a mission for all queens to stop using it, and now I actually have an appreciation for all the different terms that folks use, because there are some very big differences in reality between drag queens, faux queens, femme queens, bio-queens, and just queens. Some more subtle than others, and some may be more indicative of a specific political consciousness than others, but nonetheless they can describe very different performances.

C: And yet it's interesting - we just have "king," right? Although there are so many shades of king!

K: (laughs) Yes we do. Maybe we need to work on that next.

C: So what are you working on these days?

K: Well, I am currently working on a duet with the fabulous Mere aka Starr69 for the femme conference. We are also hoping to perform in Tease-o-Rama. I am also working with ButchTap for IDKEX. I am producing Slut Night for the annual Butch-Femme.com Bash and I am producing the Brunch for IDKEX. My current fantasy is to start a queer handbell choir called Flaming Handbells.

C: Oh my god, handbells! (laughs)

K: Wouldn't it be rad to be in a queer handbell choir? I mean, I am imagining costumes, flames, decorated handbells, but like really good music.

C: Oh, yes.



K: Another big fantasy that I have is that you and I were to live in the same town.

C: Yes! We could launch your queer handbell choir and my pansexual, cross-gender burlesque troupe!

K: And we could write and craft...

C: And take over the world, yes? With our mighty cleavage and southern charm!

K: Yes, I think we could. We could start a production company called Fried Poppins. Or Cherry Fried.

C: Cherry Fried Pop-Women. Yes, please.

fly fly goul

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XOXXOX

Your friendly genderbent staff

In 2001, a group of femme performers threw together an impromptu workshop on femme performance at IDKE3 (the 3rd International Drag King Community Extravaganza). Out of this workshop came the following manifesto. It was printed in Kingdom Magazine shortly after that year's conference, but we think it's time to reprint on behalf of a new generation of femme performers and their allies. We know that not all of ya use the term "bio-queen," and some of you love it. There are so many terms out there to describe girl drag: femme queen, faux queen, just queen, bio-queen, kitten, gogo, ladyking, female-to-female, the list could go on. Please remember that this was written seven years, and feel free to substitute in whatever word you like best.

BIO QUEEN MANIFESTO

summer's eve
kentucky fried woman
tristan taormino aka miss triss
venus envy



This piece was inspired by an open letter originally written to the drag king community, and presented November 2001 at the closing plenary of IDKE 3 as a way to address both policy regarding and recognition of bio-queen performance in drag king spaces. We'd like to publicly thank Jay Sennett, who was extraordinarily supportive of bio-queen activism during the conference, and graciously gave us the time to present our letter.

During IDKE 3, we heard many people talk about the transgressive power of drag. Regardless of our specific gender identities off stage, gender is something which can be and is performed on stage. Drag illustrates the performative nature of gender, not just in front of an audience, but in everyday life.

Many of those involved in the burgeoning drag king scene may not be familiar with the term "bio-queen." As with many definitions, we can't offer a concrete, stable meaning for the term, nor are we invested in creating one. For the sake of discussion, we offer the following: bio-queens are "biologically female" or "female-identified" individuals who consciously perform "female" genders as a means of engagement, critique, and/or celebration. Bio-queen performances insist that there are many ways to perform gender. As women, we perform various kinds of femininities and female genders - from heterosexual housewives to working dominatrixes - which are not equivalent to our "real life" identities. Our gender performances may resemble or be connected in some way to our

gender identities off stage, but they are valid **performances** nonetheless.

"Drag king" started with a simple definition: a "real" woman playing a "man." We know that this definition doesn't work for many of us, just as the boxes our culture offers (M or F) don't work. People often assume that those boxes are a comfortable fit for female-identified women or femme dykes, but they are not. When bio-queens are told, "You're girls playing girls, what's radical about that?" or when we are excluded from drag performances, our form of gender performance is devalued and invalidated. Many kings don't identify as women or female, but their performance of masculinity on stage is still valid and valued. We can see the potential and power within trans-identified drag king performances; we can allow individuals the right to claim their own transgender identities and perform variations of those identities as and in drag. Therefore, we need to open our definition of transgressive to include all active performances of gender, including those of bio-queens.

We care deeply about the drag king community; we have great respect for the importance of self-defined space for communities. We'd like to offer two examples of the many ways of creating such communities. Consider the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival: many of the issues surrounding MWMF come from the organizers' inability to engage with an evolving culture. On the other hand, various queer organizations which began under the rubric of "gay" over time have become LGBTQIA. This evolution certainly brings its own difficulties, but the struggle builds a stronger, more dynamic community, one based on mutual recognition and respect for difference. Consider the first example - a community built on exclusion and rigid definition ("womyn-born womyn"), and the second, one built on inclusion and the ability to evolve along with its constituents. Clearly, IDKE is an example of the latter.

Drag is certainly entertaining and fun, but it's also highly political. We'd like to begin a dialogue within our community in order to push at our boundaries and definitions. We assert that bio-queens are already vital members of this community, and not just as back-up performers or cute side dishes. We make important contributions to drag performances and dialogues, and we want our participation recognized and respected. We do not want to be tolerated or even invited into your space. We want to work together in a shared space to build community, inspire each other, and challenge the mainstream world's views on gender.

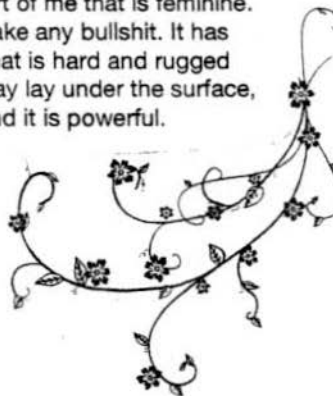


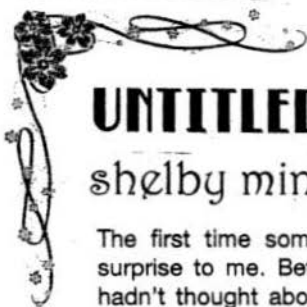
my femme king flare

I've always been a Drag King. I remember when I was six years old putting on an old-fashioned cap with a vest and lip syncing for my family. I also remember putting on a pink dress and walking down the stairs to "Material Girl" by Madonna. I of course didn't have a language to describe what I was doing every Saturday morning in my parents' house; however, when I strutted onto the scene in 1997 I definitely brought the experiences of cross-dressing with me. To me it had no gender boundaries. I used the stage to be whoever I wanted to be: to play with characters and to examine the diversity of human existence.

The first time my fierce femme appeared in 1999, I felt a surge like no other. In front of a crowd of 200 I walked, my tight outfit gripping my body, my blond wig brushing my shoulders. My partner at the time was blindfolded and handcuffed to a chair. She had no idea what was about to happen. I sucked up the energy of the audience. Their mouths agape, their eyes big, as they watched me slowly approach her. I waited till I saw her squirming in her chair, and then I slowly lifted her blindfold. Her reaction was something I will never forget; I thought she was going to pop right out of the cuffs. My inner chest tingled with delight. I had shown her this deep part of myself and she loved it. I loved it. It was empowering.

I am not a feminine-looking woman. I was not a feminine-looking girl. But there is a strong part of me that is feminine. That is the part of me that doesn't take any bullshit. It has taught me how to take something that is hard and rugged and make it soft and orgasmic. It may lay under the surface, but don't be mistaken - it is there and it is powerful.





UNTITLED

shelby mine

The first time someone described me as femme it was a surprise to me. Before that moment about four years ago, I hadn't thought about it much or ever considered it a way to describe myself. It's true that I don't have many stereotypically masculine traits and I have never performed in drag, **but do others classify me as femme simply because I am not a King?**

When others began describing me as a femme, I didn't outright accept and embrace the label, but I didn't reject it either. Neither option felt right, but over time my femme identification became solidified in other people's perception of me because I never denied it.

I feel like I was given the designation of femme by others and have had to work to build my own understanding of how I relate to it as a label. Because of this I feel incomplete and unauthentic as a femme. **I feel like a liar and a poser because I allowed others to define me instead of choosing it for myself as a personal, political, or social expression.** I have even worried that I will be found out: "She's not a real femme, just a girly girl pretending to be a femme! Get her!"

When people first started describing me as a femme I could have corrected them and told them I was unsure of my identification. I didn't because I was afraid this would make me seem apolitical, dull, or even worse...uncool. **I was still new to this big queer club and very concerned with what others thought of me.** I also didn't totally understand what being a femme meant.

At the time, I also thought rejecting the label of femme might also make me less of a feminist. I committed one of the least feminist acts possible (letting others tell me who I am as a woman) to avoid being viewed as anti-feminist. Oh, the irony!

Over the last few years I have come to develop a relationship with this identification but I have never known if it has the same (or even similar) meaning to those who have chosen it for themselves. **I think it is time I start asking. Ladies?**



THE 10TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL DRAG KINGCOMMUNITY EXTRAVAGANZA

the IDKE promo team

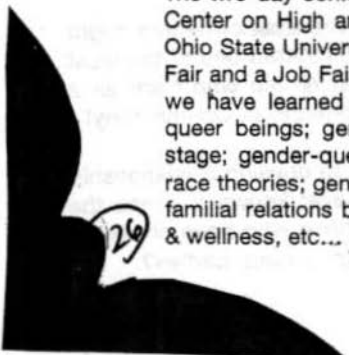
C'mon ride the train back to Columbus on **October 16-19, 2008** for the Tenth Annual International Drag KingCommunity Extravaganza.

Fast Friday Productions and Columbus, Ohio welcomes the return of gender play, performance, theory, and art after six long-awaited years. Fueled in Minnesota-MN (5), Chicago-IL (6), Winnipeg-Manitoba (7), Austin-TX (8), and Vancouver-BC (9), the IDKE.X journey back home promises to delight your international tastes in drag king community culture.

IDKE is a first-of-its-kind event in that it is a collaborative, non-competitive gathering of drag king community performers, their fans, and the people who study, photograph and film them. It was originally started by a group of Ohio State University Women's Studies Graduate Students who assembled an "insider's view on FTM drag as a subculture and craved to network beyond the Midwestern boundaries of Columbus, Ohio, circa 1998." From its grassroots beginnings, IDKE has grown from 100 attendees to the thousands expected this year.

IDKE.X features a two-day conference, Art and Film Festival, Transman Health Fair, Merchant Fair, and International Drag Performances featuring performers from New Zealand, France, Rome, Canada, and throughout the United States... all brought together to enjoy, learn, and indulge in our gender-loving culture.

The two-day conference will be hosted at Stonewall Columbus Center on High and the Frank Hale Multicultural Center at the Ohio State University. With the additions of a Transman Health Fair and a Job Fair this year, the IDKE Conference exhibits what we have learned about our historical "presence" as gender-queer beings; gender performance beyond the scope of the stage; gender-queer theory; mass popular culture and critical race theories; gender-queer community viability; the function of familial relations both past and present; Kingcommunity health & wellness, etc...



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The Art Festival will include collections from IDKE artists displayed in the Columbus Short North Businesses - as well as the debut of a new art anthology, the History of Drag Kings, exhibiting past IDKE memorabilia. The IDKE.X Film Fest presents films from drag subculture in the US, France, Canada, and more. Featuring a collection of film shorts on Friday, the Film Fest will take place at AXIS from Thursday through Saturday.

And in the spirit of our ever-evolving Gender World, IDKE culminates in a variety of stage events to delight every fancy - known or unknown. In its 10th year Friday's Dragdom, once the greenhorn stage where new performers or new aliases amused and surprised audience members, will be held at Wall Street, which formerly housed the grand weekend performance event, the Saturday Night IDKE Showcase. The IDKE.X Showcase will bring together the world's best drag performances on Columbus' finest stage, the LC Pavillion. Nominated as the finest new concert venue by Pollster Magazine in 2001, the LC Pavillion Stage will host a night of drag talent the likes of which you have never seen...acts that will leave you breathless for more, and a dance after-party with 2000+ international & national queer, queer friendly, and queer curious party-goers.

If that isn't enough, on Friday, swing by East Village for Viva's Red Light District Burlesque Show "Dames who Love their Kings": the hot and steamy loveliness of Viva Valezz and some of the most wow woW wOw VABOOM in burlesque this century. These dames are smokin'!!

Realizing the youth also need their own space to show their talents, IDKE will also host a Youth Speakeasy in coordination with Stonewall Columbus. The Youth Speakeasy turns the mic over to the new generation of performers. We welcome musicians, singers, spoken word artists, and performers from ages 4 to 18 to their very own stage production.

IDKE ends on Sunday with the Brunch, which will be hosted at Columbus' newest lounge and danceclub, LIQUID. Come enjoy the wonderful LIQUID brunch fare & reminisce with new friends and old before they depart - while getting one last gender boost of theatrical acts, spoken word, and live music.

IDKE.X is all you can ask for, and all the things you couldn't bring yourself to speak of. Don't miss the train. www.idkex.com

homoscopes: the all femme edition

venus envy &

jodi bon jodi



ARIES

Aries (Mar 21-Apr 19): Sometimes you need to remember your manners, Aries.



Taurus (Apr 20 - May 20): This is your time to shine, Taurus. Go after that hot king you had your eye on or woo that new hot femme that just moved to town.



GEMINI

Gemini (May 21 - Jun 21): Try and keep it to minimal costume changes in one day, Gemini. Your houseboy is tired of doing so much laundry.



CANCER

Cancer (Jun 22 - Jul 22): Time to leave the house and learn to be social, Cancer. Break out of the shell and let your inner queen shine.



LEO

Leo (Jul 23 - Aug 22): Let go of some of your biases this month and maybe you will open yourself up to a new kind of relationship. And by new kind of relationship, that means go get your rocks off...



VIRGO

Virgo (Aug 23 - Sep 22): This month Virgo, watch out. You might be asked to be a token femme in a piece and you will have to defend your place as a performer. Stand strong and fight for your drag sisters everywhere.



LIBRA

Libra (Sep 23 - Oct 23): Stop it with the Boho Chic look; it just doesn't work for you.



SCORPIO

Scorpio (Oct 24 - Nov 21): Rawr Scorpio. In case you were wondering, yes you should get the new Viva Glam lipstick from MAC. It will go with your sissy persona.



SAGITTARIUS

Sagittarius (Nov 22 - Dec 21): Take a step away from the troupe for a minute and figure out what your goals and needs are. You never know what can happen in your performance life if you have a moment of clarity.



CAPRICORN

Capricorn (Dec 22 - Jan 19): Remember to have fun this time, Capricorn. Don't over-think your life, just let go and have a good time.



AQUARIUS

Aquarius (Jan 20 - Feb 18): Maybe coming down from the clouds is just what you need to make the changes necessary in your life to be the best queen you can be. Work it out.



PISCES

Pisces (Feb 19 - Mar 20): Sometimes, Pisces, you just need to let go of it.

FemmeCast: The Queer Fat Femme Podcast Guide to Life is an audio newsmagazine for Queer Fat Femmes, Fatshionistas of all sexualities and Queers of all genders. Hosted by Bevin Branlandingham with a cadre of regular contributors, we're discussing dating, fat fashion, social justice, friendships, sex, gender, tranny talk, culture, travel, community and feature new music by Queer artists. A whimsical This American Life meets a radical queer how-to novel with MTV generation timing, FemmeCast will keep listeners laughing, connected and inspired. www.femme-cast.com.

IDKEX! Registration now open! October 6-19, 2008.
Columbus, OH. www.idkex.com.

Kings N Things presents Drag Kings the Musical: The Big Screen Edition. That's right, for the 2nd year running it's all show tunes, all the time. This time, presenting your fave songs from movie musicals. In Austin, TX, September 12-14. www.kingsnthings.org or on the Myspace: myspace.com/kingsnthings.

Call for submissions:

For the next issue of genderbent - the history & community issue. What inspires you about the drag king community? Have something to reflect on about our history, where we've been, where we're going? Have something to say about our community today? Living in, contributing to it, what you get out of it? We want your essays, stories, paragraphs, prose, poetry, ramblings, artwork, comics, funny little thoughts (or serious little thoughts). Submission deadline: October 1.

contact us:

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or on the myspace:

www.myspace.com/genderbentzine

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